

Most dog owners would pull a sickie to care for their pet, new research highlights

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The vast majority of dog owners would consider pulling a sickie to care for their pets as they prepare to return to work post-lockdown, new research has shown.

Almost three quarters are worried about how returning to work will affect their pet, the survey revealed.

The poll by leading UK separation anxiety expert and author Julie Naismith is a snapshot of how dog owners are feeling ahead of an anticipated widespread end to working from home as UK bosses plan to boost post-pandemic productivity.

The survey revealed more than 85 per cent of the 900 people surveyed would consider taking time off sick to look after their pets.

Over half, 54 per cent, also said they would consider quitting their current jobs if their employers didn't allow them to take their dogs to work with them. More than 80 per cent are looking into doggy day-care with a quarter of the remainder believing this is too expensive an option.

Julie said: "You need to send your dog to day-care or a petsitter if you can. Day-care will help your dog remember that there's more to their world than just being with you."

Julie, best-selling author of *Be Right Back*, a guide to overcoming separation anxiety in dogs, said she wasn't surprised by the survey results and was encouraged to see how much owners love their dogs and put their welfare above other considerations.

Three-quarters of those surveyed had got a dog in lockdown.

And while Julie said she couldn't condone taking a 'sickie' to care for them, she could understand the desperation owners may feel if their pets suffer with separation anxiety.

"Honesty is the best policy," said Julie. "I'm hoping there are some understanding bosses out there who would appreciate that caring for a beloved part of the family is vital and a frank conversation about this would be better than fibbing.

"The key is to make sure you train your pet to be alone, they can respond really well, my 10-year-old cockapoo Percy is a perfect example of this, he used to be really stressed when I wasn't around but he is comfortable with it now."

More than 80 per cent of owners said that faced with a return to working environment, they had invested in dog training in a bid to reduce anxiety for their dog.

Despite this there are people outside of Julie's research group who believe training your dog to be

alone can be cruel. And she says, there are harmful myths about separation anxiety that need to be busted – for the good of both the dog and the owner.

“The thing is, some dogs are really going to struggle. Being alone doesn’t come naturally to dogs. We’ve spent 30,000 years selecting dogs for their desire to be with humans. No wonder so many get upset when we leave. We’ve seen two things happen over the last year - either puppies who never learned how to be alone or adult dogs who used to be fine forgot how to be alone.

“The good news is though that we can still teach these dogs how to handle being alone. Even though you might be in a panic about this you can train your dog to be comfortable when you leave.”

Julie’s expertise has helped thousands of dogs and their owners from around the world overcome this complex behavioural condition.

She said: “People think training a dog to be more comfortable without them is really difficult, it doesn’t have to be.”

Julie’s top five tips for helping your dog overcome separation anxiety:

1 Start by teaching your dog that you coming and going is no big deal. I call this the ‘Door is a Bore game’. You step in and out of the door repeatedly until your dog goes ‘this is silly’.

2 Then start stepping outside for small amounts of time. Watch your dog on camera as you do this. Gradually build up the time and let your dog dictate the pace. The technique we use is the exact same technique we use to help people overcome their fears: Gradual exposure therapy.

3 When a dog doesn't like being home alone, they're not being spiteful, they're not being bad, they're frightened of being home alone. They have a phobia of it. And that's why gradual exposure really helps – by exposing them to their fear and overcoming it.

4 Letting your dog ‘cry it out’ is an old training method and it doesn’t work. You have to be more gradual and gentler about it. Crating your dog won’t help either. Most dogs with a fear of being left alone hate being crated.

5 Avoid the many things you might have read about as fixes for separation anxiety. Food toys, calming chews, diffusers, pressure vests, leaving music on and natural remedies just don’t work for most dogs. Stick with training instead.

Yorkshire-born Julie now lives in the Canadian Rockies, and pandemic restrictions permitting, divides her time between the UK and Canada.

Her new book, *Be Right Back! The Puppy Separation Anxiety Edition* is out now. It follows her international bestselling guide to separation anxiety in adult dogs, *Be Right Back!*

For more information on Julie’s programmes for owners or for trainers

visit: <https://www.subthresholdtraining.com/>

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Notes:

The survey was carried out in the open Facebook group Dog Separation Anxiety Training. All questions had 900 responses no questions were skipped. A full breakdown of the survey results:

Q1 Were you furloughed or asked to work from home at any point since March 2020?

Yes 85.44% (769)

No 14.56% (131)

Q2 Did you take on a new dog/puppy during this time?

Yes 72.11% (649)

No 27.89% (251)

Q3 Have you now been asked to return to your workplace?

Yes 59.44 % (535)

No 40.56% (365)

Q4 If you don't have a specific date for returning to your office/site do you expect that you will be required to at some point?

Yes 71.78% (646)

No 11.33% (102)

Possibly 16.89% (152)

Q5 Are you worried about how your dog will cope with this?

Not at all 7.78% (70)

Somewhat 23.44% (211)

Very 68.78% (619)

Q6 Would you consider giving up your job/changing job to be at home with your dog?

Yes 24.89% 224

No 46.22% 416

Maybe 28.89% 260

Q7 Would you take a sick day to take care of your dog?

Yes 64.67% 582

No 14.33% (129)

Maybe 21% (189)

Q8 If you don't already take your dog to work would you ask your employer if you could take your dog to work?

Yes 12.67% (114)

No 56% (504)

I might 16.11% (145)

I've already asked them 15.22% (137)

Q9 Would you consider leaving your job if your employer said this wasn't possible?

Yes 12.56% (113)

No 66.11% (595)

I might 21.33% (192)

Q10 Have you considered using doggy daycare or a pet sitter?

Yes 81.67% (735)

No 18.33% (165)

Q11 If you haven't, why not?

My dog is too old/too young 2.33% (21)

My dog doesn't like other dogs 8.78% (79)

There isn't one close to me 4.67% (42)

Too expensive 24.11% (217)

Other 15.67% (141)

None of the above 55% (495)

Q12 What have you tried to get your dog to be more comfortable?

Training 81.11% (730)

Natural remedies 39.44% (355)

Calming music/TV 67.67% (609)

Prescription medication 21.44% (193)

Leaving enrichment toys/chews/puzzle feeders 70.11% (631)

Pressure vests 12.11% (109)

Pheromone plug-ins 28.89% (260)

Other 6.33% (57)

None of the above 3% (27)

Q13 What support do you feel you need to help you and your dog as you return to a working environment away from home?

An understanding employer 36.56% (329)

Friends and family who could step in 48.33% (435)

Reasonably-priced day care/petsitting options 64.67% (582)

Training support to help your dog get over this 79.89% (719)

Other 6.89% (62)

Julie's bio:

Julie Naismith helps owners and dogs around the world overcome separation anxiety and get their lives back on track. While most dog professionals work across a range of cases, Julie is one of the few who focuses on a niche. Julie's specialist knowledge means that she's come across hundreds of different separation anxiety cases and fully appreciates the nuances of this complex behavioral condition. Not only does Julie help thousands of dogs and their families, her global SA Pro Certification program trains trainers in her method so that, they too, can help dogs overcome separation anxiety. Julie acquired her skills and knowledge at the Academy for Dog Trainers, often referred to as the Harvard for dog trainers, where she was taught by world-renowned trainer Jean Donaldson.

Originally from Yorkshire, England, Julie currently lives in the Canadian Rockies, and pandemic restrictions permitting, divides her time between the UK and Canada.

Julie's new book, *Be Right Back! The Puppy Separation Anxiety Edition* will be available in August, and follows her international bestselling guide to separation anxiety in adult dogs, *Be Right Back!*